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# Exploring the Associations between Standards for Service Delivery (Organisational Culture), Co-Worker Support, Self-Efficacy, Job Satisfaction and Customer Orientation in the Real Estate Industry

## ***Abstract:***

The study examines the effects of organisational and individual factors of Real Estate agents on customer orientation. The organisational factors included are standards for service delivery (culture), supervisor support and co-worker support. The individual factors examined are self-efficacy, job satisfaction. The sample comprises 108 employees in the real estate industry. The moderating effects of job satisfaction and co-worker support between standards for service delivery and customer orientation and self-efficacy on the relationship between co-worker support and customer orientation offer new insights into the antecedents of customer orientation in a high-pressure selling oriented industry, which have implications for staff selection and training and work organisation. This paper presents an original contribution to understanding the effects of individual and organisational characteristics on customer orientation.

***Keywords:*** Customer-orientation, self-efficacy, organisational-culture, interpersonal-support, satisfaction.

## **1. Introduction**

Sustainable competitive advantage is likely to depend on an organisation's level of market orientation, which means setting and maintaining a culture that effectively fosters behaviours that lead to customers' perception of superior value (Narver and Slater, 1990). Market orientation implies listening to and understanding customers' needs and delivering solutions and services that meet customers' needs, which indicates customer orientation. (Menguc and Auh, 2006). Customer orientation is different from sales orientation in that sales people with customer orientation are more active in improving their industry knowledge, skills, recognising and empathising with customers' needs better (Bagozzi, Verbeke, van dem Berg, Rietdijk, Dietvorst, Worm, 2012). Customer orientation is often conceptualised as either a cultural or a behavioural phenomenon. However, customer orientation is often affected by organisational culture, particularly where the latter is an antecedent to the former (Hennig-Thurau and Thurau, 2003). Individuals do not necessarily work in isolation so it is reasonable to acknowledge the organisational conditions that may influence customer orientation. Indeed, optimum service performance is not the sole responsibility of the frontline provider since conducive managerial behaviours and commitment to service quality are imperative (Brown, Mowen, Donovan, and Licata 2002; Elmadag, Ellinger, Franke, 2008).

Conditions such as standards for service delivery are shown to be a key influence on staff behaviour in organisations as they positively contribute towards employees' affect and performance on the job. Therefore, organisational factors work in concert with the individual employee's psychological attributes, which include self-efficacy and job satisfaction as influences on customer orientation attitude and job performance (Kilic and Dursun, 2007; Hartline and Ferrell, 1996). The service employees' self-belief about their own ability to perform the job well (self-efficacy) is

directly linked with customer service orientation as is enjoyment and job satisfaction derived from effectively interacting well with customers (Brown et al, 2002).

At an organisational level, customer orientation has three antecedents: management standards for service delivery, supervisor support and co-worker support (Susskind, Borchgrevink, and Kacmar, 2003). As previously mentioned, culture (standards for service delivery) is a key influence on behavioural outcomes, influencing the service provider's affect and performance behaviour (Hennig-Thurau and Thurau, 2003). This is enhanced by the support functions provided by supervisors and co-workers (Susskind et al, 2003). Staffs who feel supported by the company's management and other employees (managers, supervisors and co-workers) tend to have higher customer orientation and perform better (Vandenberghe et al., 2007). Therefore, a supportive staff environment includes standards for service delivery (organisational culture), supervisor support and co-worker support. Nevertheless, service-oriented work is often stressful and this may have deleterious effects on workers, which may affect health, self-efficacy, job performance and satisfaction (Lings, Durden, Lee and Cadogan, 2009; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002).

The nature and industry context of the organisation may also affect customer orientation. The research context, in this study, is the real estate industry in Australia. Previous research has suggested that customer oriented selling is both crucial and complex in the real estate industry (Harris, Mowen and Brown, 2005). The industry has a bad reputation generally in relation to service performance (Brinkmann, 2009). One possible cause of the poor reputation is the high-pressure sales oriented nature of the industry, which may partly serve organisational performance but does not necessarily lead to customer orientation in staff (Arnold, Palmatier, Grewal, and Sharma, 2009).

This paper examines the direct and interaction effects of job satisfaction, self-efficacy and interpersonal support (co-worker and supervisor) on the relationship between standards for service delivery (organisational culture) and customer orientation.

## **2. Customer Orientation and Service Workers**

Ultimately, service employees are crucial to customer satisfaction and their perceptions of service quality (Hennig Thureau and Thureau, 2003). Research shows that customer orientation is a psychological variable, an attitude that is related to important outcomes such as the employee's overall performance, customer oriented behaviours, and commitment (Grizzle, Zablah, Brown, Mowen and Lee, 2009, Stock and Hoyer, 2005). Customer orientation is an individual's predisposition to attend to customers' needs during the job performance (Brown, Mowen, Donovan and Licata, 2002, Skalen, 2009). However, understanding customer orientation is not a simple, as it is a complex, multidimensional construct that is determined by a number of conditions involving the precise role of the service employee (front or backstage), personal disposition and organisational culture (Hennig Thureau and Thureau, 2003).

As boundary spanners, the front-line employees are the face of the organisation and their service provision constitutes an important element of the service product since employees may be the only physical representation of the organisation that the customer meets so it is vital that the interaction between the staff and customer is perceived positively (Payne and Webber, 2006). For the interaction to be successful, frontline staffs need a clear understanding of management expectations and organisational standards as these influence employees' performance and

customers' responses to the service received (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996). Co-worker support is also an important antecedent to customer orientation and may intervene in the relationship between organisational standards and customer orientation (Susskind et al., 2003; Hennig Thurau and Thurau, 2003).

Service workers who are successful in modifying their service delivery to suit customers' needs are said to be customer oriented (Susskind et al., 2003). Customer orientation is conceptualised from two perspectives, attitudes and behaviours (Stock and Hoyer, 2005). As an attitude, customer orientation as an attitude is concerned with service providers placing a high level of importance on fulfilling the needs of their customers (Kelley, 1992). Service providers with a customer oriented attitude tend to display customer oriented behaviours and performance (Grizzle et al., 2009). Such behaviours are critical for staff to develop long-term relationships with their customers, and achieve competitive advantage for the organisation (Valenzuela, Mulki, Jaramillo, 2010).

Successful behaviours towards customers necessarily start with a motivation to behave in a customer oriented manner and this is affected by conditions such as role conflict or ambiguity, job satisfaction, management commitment and organisational commitment. If these conditions are met, and the employee has the desire to serve customers well, they should feel confident in the desired outcomes of their customer behaviours, believe that they can produce the desired outcome and feel that they will be adequately rewarded for their efforts (Hennig Thurau and Thurau, 2003). Therefore, the end level of customer orientation depends on a complex mix and balance of many variables and these contribute towards the ability and tendency to display customer oriented behaviours, which in turn leads to organisational success and profitability (Saxe and Weitz, 1982; Grizzle et al., 2009).

Undoubtedly, customer oriented behaviours and attitudes are desirable but where the service providers' attitude does not genuinely match their behaviour, there may be negative consequences for employee and customer well-being and satisfaction (Hochschild, 1983, Stock and Hoyer, 2005). This implies that managers need to be aware of the differences between behaviour and attitude and consider how organisational standards and internal support may affect employees (Susskind et al., 2003).

In essence, service staff's customer orientation is central to a company's ability to be truly market oriented which is essential for a positive image, trust building, continuing profitability. Customer orientation has a positive impact on developing customer trust, which is associated with customer satisfaction, intentions to recommend and repurchase as well as limiting switching behaviour, which are key considerations for marketing managers (Guenzi and Georges, 2010; Susskind, Borchgrevink and Kacmar, 2003). Customer orientation is an application of the marketing concept and links with business success and profitability (Saxe and Weitz, 1982; Grizzle et al., 2009).

### **3. Standards for Service Delivery (organisational culture)**

Organisational issues affect customer orientation and ultimately employee job performance and affect employees' knowledge that they are valued by the organisation. Appropriate service standards have a positive influence on employees' affect and behaviour (Susskind et al., 2003; Hennig Thurau and Thurau, 2003). As previously mentioned organisational standards are antecedent to customer orientation and ultimate customer satisfaction and have been shown to work in concert with co-

worker and supervisor support (Susskind et al., 2003; Susskind, Kacmar, Michele and Borchgrevink, 2007). Whilst the nature of work and job requirements may differ in different industries, organisations' expectations of service worker performance, implicit and explicit, are considered necessary for the effective setting of customer service oriented performance standards. Setting of organisational standards is part of the internal marketing process, which may link to both employee and customer satisfaction. This link should not be overlooked as customer orientation depends on the organisation having a marketing orientation, which is positively associated with success (Vaux Halliday, 2010).

Setting standards is complex and a simplistic management understanding of customer orientation may lead to a superficial staff display of customer orientation without a true commitment to customer service (Stock and Hoyer, 2005). Research has highlighted the practical consequences of such problems for organisations of superficial attention to customer service, which includes a reduction in service standards and customer orientation, increased costs due to employee ill health and absenteeism, and other harmful employee behaviours (Lings et al; 2009; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002). The communication of organisational expectations and norms is important for developing desirable customer oriented behaviours and a market oriented organisational culture (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000). The following hypothesis is advanced:

H<sub>1</sub> Standards for Service Delivery (organisational culture) positively influence customer orientation.



Organisational success through market orientation is influenced by managers, supervisors, co-workers and the frontline service providers. This is complex chain of causation, which may be difficult to understand as it is necessary to explore the interactions and relationships between the key players (Vaux Halliday, 2010). Vella, Gountas and Walker (2009) found that employees' consider internal organisational structures and processes to be influential of service quality delivery. Their empirical research findings suggest that service orientation, standardised (scripted) service delivery and service role flexibility are strong predictors of service quality delivery. The individual characteristics of frontline line service staff and the service organisation's total involvement are essential ingredients for the development and delivery of true customer orientation.

#### **4. Supervisor and Co-worker Support**

Supervisor and co-worker support are known to potentially influence employee productivity and overall organisational performance (Duffy, Ganster and Pagon, 2002). Employee interactions with supervisors and co-workers have both positive and negative emotional and behavioural outcomes (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008). Whether co-worker or supervisor support or both have a positive effect on customer orientations seems to depend on the industry context. Research has shown that in some situations (e.g., restaurant services) there is a stronger, positive and significant association between co-worker support and customer orientation but a weaker association between management standards for service delivery. However, the research did not find any significant association between supervisor support and customer orientation (Susskind et al., 2007).

Organisational hierarchy and structure affects employees' need for co-worker support and social interaction with colleagues. In most organisations, workers are more likely to have closer relationships with co-workers than managers. In situations where workers experience role overload, for example, working in high pressure situations such as real estate, co-workers may be helpful in relieving stress through offering emotional support. Co-worker support is therefore associated with positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, involvement and commitment (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008). This leads us to the following hypothesis:

H<sub>2a</sub>: Co-worker support positively influences customer orientation.

Clearly, the need for co-worker support is affected by organisational conditions. However, interactions with co-workers can be both encouraging and discouraging in the development of job satisfaction, involvement, organisational commitment and personal performance (Duffy et al., 2002). As co- associated with customer orientation and other positive organisational outcomes, they should be of concern to managers. Therefore we hypothesise that:

H<sub>2b</sub>: The higher the co-worker support, the stronger the relationship between standards for service delivery and customer orientation.

Many studies indicate the importance of supervisor support in helping employees to perform their job well. Supervisor support may have an effect on greater employee commitment to the organisation, which, in turn, may lead to greater

employee customer oriented behaviour (Susskind et al., 2003; Duffy, Ganster and Pagon, 2002). Our hypothesis therefore is:

H<sub>3a</sub>: Supervisor support positively influences customer orientation.

Research suggests that employee well-being is positively related to the supervisors' assessment and positive support of their job performance (Wright and Cropanzano, 2000). However, if there is a lack of supervisor support and, especially if the supervisor is undermining the employees, it can have a stronger negative impact on employee outcomes such as lower perceived self-efficacy and more counterproductive behaviours (Duffy, Ganster and Pagon, 2002). It is not clearly understood if the support by the supervisors and co-workers has a direct effect, or if both co-worker and supervisor support could operate as moderators of the relationship between standards of service delivery and customer orientation (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008; Susskind et al, 2003). Co-worker and supervisor support may in fact complement and strengthen the relationship between organisational standards and customer orientation (Liaw, Chi, and Chuang, 2010). Therefore, the relationships of both, direct and moderating effects of co-worker support and supervisor support should be tested. This leads us to hypothesise that:

H<sub>3b</sub>: The higher the supervisor support, the stronger the relationship between standards for service delivery and customer orientation.

If the above hypotheses are supported, it would suggest that organisational and co-worker support functions may be quasi moderators of the relationship between

standards for service delivery and customer orientation because they have direct and indirect intervening effects (Sharma, Durand and Gur-Arie, 1981).

## **5. Self-Efficacy**

Many studies indicate a causal relationship between job satisfaction, self-efficacy and performance outcomes (Judge, Jackson, Shaw, Scott and Rich, 2007). A self-efficacious employee has belief in their ability to perform well in their job role and this is shown to actually increase in actual performance outcomes and job satisfaction (Judge and Bono, 2001). An individual's self-efficacy increases over time, which in turn increases employee effort and subsequent customer orientation (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996). Therefore our hypothesis is:

H<sub>4a</sub>: Self-efficacy influences positively customer orientation.

High self-efficacy service workers tend to use more logical problem solving coping strategies, as opposed to low self-efficacy service workers who tend to operate and react more emotionally and therefore less effectively. Perceptions of low self efficacy may have a greater impact on employee stress and require more support by the organisation. Also, employees with high self-efficacy are more likely to cope well with high risk, and stressful jobs (Jex and Bliese, 1999), such as the real estate industry. It is possible that, if employees are high on self-efficacy they may have lower need for interpersonal support to perform well. Furthermore, we propose that there is a positive association between self-efficacy and job satisfaction, which is beneficial to the organisation, because job satisfaction is positively associated with job performance and customer orientation (Judge and Bono, 2001; Judge, Thoresen,

Bono and Patton, 2001; Bettencourt, Meuter and Gwinner, 2001; Brown and Peterson, 1993).

Therefore we pose the following three hypotheses:

H<sub>4b</sub>: The higher the employee's self-efficacy, the weaker the relationship between co-worker support and customer orientation.

H<sub>4c</sub>: The higher the employee's self-efficacy, the weaker the relationship between supervisor support and customer orientation.

H<sub>5</sub>: Self-efficacy positively influences job satisfaction.

## **6. Job Satisfaction**

Both self-efficacy and job satisfaction are important antecedents to customers' perceptions of service quality. Therefore, managers need to understand these relationships and work towards enhancing self efficacy and job satisfaction to increase service quality (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996). Job satisfaction is an employee's affective evaluation of their working conditions and environment. Research suggests that higher levels of job satisfaction are positively associated with job performance outcomes such as customer orientation (Judge, Thoresen, Bono and Patton, 2001; Bettencourt, Meuter and Gwinner, 2001; Brown and Peterson, 1993). Some studies have indicated that the relationship between job satisfaction and performance is not always direct because other conditions may influence or interact with this relationship (Wright, Cropanzano and Bonett, 2007). For example, job satisfaction may interact with customer orientation and organizational citizenship behaviours (Donovan, Brown

and Mowen, 2004). Therefore, it is possible that job satisfaction may affect the relationship between organisational standards and customer orientation. Our hypothesis is:

H<sub>6</sub>: The higher the employee's job satisfaction, the stronger the relationship between standards for service delivery and customer orientation.

Customer oriented employees tend to experience higher job satisfaction which has a positive impact on the employees' perception of well-being. Satisfied employees are then more disposed to provide customer service that exceeds usual expectations (Donovan et al., 2004; Hartline and Ferrell, 1996). It is further hypothesised that the relationship between customer orientation and job satisfaction is moderated by employee self-efficacy (Judge and Bono, 2001). Hence, we pose the following two hypotheses:

H<sub>7a</sub>: Customer orientation positively influences job satisfaction.

H<sub>7b</sub>: The higher the self-efficacy the stronger the relationship between customer orientation and job satisfaction.

The literature review has guided the development of our hypotheses and our conceptual research model (Figure 1) summarises the direct and intervening construct relationships.

### **Figure 1: The Conceptual Model**

## **7. Research Methodology**

### *7.1 Participants*

The real estate industry employee survey was conducted electronically via the internet, using a professional Online Marketing Research company. Real estate agencies were contacted by email and were directed to the online survey link. The survey was voluntary and completed anonymously. The number of fully completed questionnaires is N=108. The questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Most of the respondents (63%) are 40 plus years of age; 60% are managers; 40% of participants are sales agents. most of the respondents (70%) have been working for more than five years; and 66% are males and 34% females and it was carried out in the state of Victoria, Australia.

### *7.2 Questionnaire Measures*

The study uses the following measures of individual and organisational conditions, with appropriate adaptation for the Real Estate industry context (See Appendix 1 for all the construct measurement items): Employee Self-Efficacy (Jones, 1986), Job Satisfaction (Brown, and Peterson, 1993), Customer Orientation, Co-worker Support, Supervisor Support, Standards for Service Delivery (Susskind et al, 2003; Susskind et al., 2007).

## **8. Research Findings**

Correlational, descriptive and reliability analysis of all variables is shown in Table 1. The average variance extracted from each variable compared with the shared variance between variables suggests discriminant validity between constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The simple correlation analysis suggests positive relationships

between standards for service delivery (SSD), supervisor support (SS), co-worker support (CWS), employee self-efficacy (ESE), job satisfaction (JS) and customer orientation (CO).

**Table 1: Means, Correlations, AVE and Cronbach alphas**

Regression analysis and moderation tests were carried out to test the hypotheses in the conceptual model. Our hypothesis testing followed the method recommended by Aiken and West (1991). The moderator variables are continuous, with all data mean centred, and the three levels of the moderator were  $\pm 1$  standard deviation and the mean (zero).

Table 2 presents the results of the moderating regression of two constructs, CWS and SS, on the relationship between SSD and CO. The analysis suggests that there is a direct positive significant relationship between SSD and CO ( $\beta = .370$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but there is no significant relationship between CWS and CO ( $\beta = .101$ ,  $p = .978$ ). The interaction of CWS on the relationship between SSD and CO is significant ( $\beta = -.153$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The slope analysis (Figure 2) shows that if CWS is low (i.e. one standard deviation below the mean), the relationship between SSD and CO is stronger ( $\beta = .493$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than when CWS is at the mean ( $\beta = .282$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, if CWS is high (i.e. one standard deviation above the mean) the relationship between SSD and CO is not significant ( $\beta = .071$ ,  $p = .547$ ). Hence, hypotheses H1 and H2<sub>b</sub> are accepted. Hypothesis 2<sub>a</sub> is rejected.

Supervisor support (SS) has no significant relationship with CO ( $\beta = .109$ ,  $p = .148$ ). The moderating effect of SS on the relationship between SSD on CO is not significant ( $\beta = -.037$ ,  $p = .359$ ). Therefore, hypotheses 3<sub>a</sub> and 3<sub>b</sub> are rejected.



**Table 2: Moderating effect of Co-worker (CWS) and Supervisor Support (SS)**

**Figure 2: The Moderating Effect of Co-Worker Support on standards for Service Delivery and Customer Orientation**

Table 3 indicates a positive significant relationship between ESE and CO ( $\beta = .486, p < .01$ ) and the interaction between CWS and ESE on CO is significant ( $\beta = -.236, p < .01$ ).

Slope analysis shows that if ESE is low (Figure 3), (i.e. one standard deviation below the mean), the relationship between CWS and CO is the strongest ( $\beta = .455, p < .001$ ). When ESE is at the mean there is a significant relationship between CWS and CO ( $\beta = .260, p < .001$ ). When ESE is high (i.e. one standard deviation above the mean) the relationship between CWS and CO is not significant ( $\beta = .064, p = .236$ ). Additionally, regression analysis indicates that ESE has a positive strong influence on job satisfaction ( $\beta = .439, p < .001$ ). Therefore, Hypotheses H4<sub>a</sub>, H4<sub>b</sub>, and H5 are accepted.

The interaction between SS and ESE on CO is not significant ( $\beta = -.123, p = .088$ ), Hypothesis 4<sub>c</sub> is rejected.

**Table 3: Moderating Effect of Self-Efficacy on the Relationship between Co-worker Support and Customer Orientation**

**Figure 3: The Moderating Effect of Self-Efficacy on the Relationship between Co-worker Support and Customer Orientation**

Table 4 shows the moderating regression results for JS on the relationship between SSD (organisational culture) and CO. The interaction between SSD and JS on CO is significant ( $\beta=.100$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The slope analysis (Figure 4) shows when JS is low, (i.e. one standard deviation below the mean), the relationship between SSD and CO is the weakest ( $\beta=.354$ ,  $p<.001$ ). When JS is at the mean there is a significant relationship between SSD and CO ( $\beta=.465$ ,  $p<.001$ ). When JS is high (i.e. one standard deviation above the mean) the relationship between SSD and CO is the strongest ( $\beta=.573$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Regression analysis indicates a significant, positive influence of CO on JS ( $\beta=.391$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Hence, Hypotheses 6 and 7a are accepted.

**Table 4: Moderating effect of Job Satisfaction**

**Figure 4: The Moderating Effect of Job Satisfaction on Standards for Service Delivery and Customer Orientation**

Table 5 indicates that ESE has a moderating effect on the relationship between CO and JS ( $\beta=.250$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The slope analysis (Figure 5) shows when ESE is low, (i.e. one standard deviation below the mean), the relationship between SSD and CO is the weakest ( $\beta=.269$ ,  $p<.05$ ). When ESE is at the mean there is a significant stronger relationship between SSD and CO ( $\beta=.477$ ,  $p<.001$ ). When ESE is high (i.e. one standard deviation above the mean) the relationship between SSD and CO is strongest ( $\beta=.684$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 7b is accepted.

**Table 5: Moderating effect of Self-Efficacy on the relationship between Customer Orientation and Job satisfaction**

**Figure 5: The Moderating Effect of Self-Efficacy on the relationship between Customer Orientation and Job satisfaction**

Table 6 provides a summary of which Hypotheses are supported and which are not.

**Table 6: Summary of the Hypotheses and Findings**

## **9. Discussion**

The findings of this research indicate the importance of understanding the full effects of standards for service delivery, interpersonal support, job satisfaction and self-efficacy on customer orientation. These provide important insights given that human organisational interactions are complex, dynamic and multifaceted.

Customer orientation is an attitudinal attribute that has a positive impact on customer satisfaction and job performance. Therefore, understanding the antecedents and interactions that influence customer orientation in any given industry context is critical. Customer orientation is an important and highly relevant issue for all service organisations because it is more likely to produce better results than hard sales orientated attitudes (Bagozzi et al, 2012). Overall, the findings indicate that standards for service delivery, which are concerned with organisational culture, are an important antecedent to customer orientation. The effectiveness of standards for service delivery is influenced by other characteristics.

Self-efficacy has a direct relationship with customer orientation, which is significant across the three regression models. This finding highlights the particular importance of self-efficacy as it not only helps to reduce and prevent negative consequences of service work such as stress, it grows stronger over time and has a positive impact on job performance (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996). Possibly, self-efficacious employees feel more comfortable in their role, therefore better able to cope with negative emotions, difficulties and better able to work independently (Judge and Bono, 2001). Attributes such as self-efficacy are extremely helpful in an industry, such as real estate, which has a high level of pressure for the employees, and is high involvement and emotionally charged for the customers (Arnold, Palmatier, Grewal, and Sharma, 2009). Self-efficacy is connected to individual differences (Judge,

Jackson, Shaw, Scott and Rich, 2007), and may have implications for careful recruitment of staff who are well trained and able to perform adequately in competitive and stressful situations. It is interesting that self-efficacy moderates the relationship between co-worker support and customer orientation. The results suggest that employees higher in self-efficacy do not rely on co-worker support to achieve customer orientation.

Although the findings suggest that standards of service delivery positively affect customer orientation, the moderating effect of higher levels of co-worker support reduces the relationship between standards of service delivery and customer orientation. Also, the moderating effect of supervisor support does not increase the relationship between standards for service delivery and consumer orientation.

Contrary to previous studies (Susskind et al, 2003) there is no direct or indirect relationship between supervisor support or co-worker support on standards for service delivery and customer orientation. The study found no support for the hypothesis that supervisor support moderates the relationship between standards for service delivery and customer orientation. However, other studies indicate that supervisors may have an undermining effect on the employee's ability to deliver customer oriented services (Duffy et al., 2002).

More research is needed to investigate the possibility that different service industries vary in the degree of achieving short term sales oriented results at the expense of longer term customer orientation and customer satisfaction. Real estate employees usually work in a high sales pressure environment with demanding sales targets to achieve. Competition amongst staff inside and outside the real estate organisation is high and staff rewards are dependent on sales achievements. Therefore, supervisor support and co-worker support may be perceived as a negative

sign of needing help and not being as self-efficacious as one ought to be. Real estate employees may often need to work individually and not in groups, therefore, they can be reluctant to seek support from superiors within the organisation in fear of being perceived as poor performers and which may influence adversely their career prospects . Another explanation may lie in the nature of the service interaction and type of relationship between the real estate employees and customers. Customers usually distrust real estate agents and therefore the additional influence of supervisor support may complicate this interaction (Roulac, 1999, 2006; Aziz, 2005; Larsen et al., 2007). Clearly, this issue needs further investigation to examine if there are industry specific differences regarding the moderating influences of supervisors, standards of service and customer orientation.

High co-worker support does not moderate the relationship between standards for service delivery and customer orientation. Where co-worker support is low the relationship between standards for service delivery and customer orientation is significant, but it is not significant at the mean or higher level. This is an interesting finding and worth further investigation. Future research should investigate whether the level of internal and external (intra and inter) competition has an influence on the interaction between organisational standards for service delivery and consumer orientation attitudes. Possibly, if the internal competitive environment is intense (highly individualistic competitive real estate environment), there is likely to be little or no co-worker support; but the reverse will occur if there is less intra-competitive pressure more co-worker support may occur and this may increase its moderating effect on customer orientation. Secondly, co-workers sometimes have negative effects about each other and other employees thus creating a negative environment and producing counter-productive behaviours (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008; Duffy et al.,

2002). Co-workers influence is known to create both positive and negative work attitudes and performance outcomes (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008) therefore, it is essential to explore the effects of organisational and employees' psychological characteristics in the real estate industry. For example, in organisations where the structure is flatter in hierarchy, co-worker support may be the only opportunity for emotional support and mentoring that does not directly involve a manager.

Self-efficacy has a direct relationship with customer orientation, which is strong and significant across all the three regression models. The findings indicate the high level of importance of self-efficacy as a characteristic that helps organisations to improve perceived customer orientation and satisfaction and therefore reduce negative customer experiences. High levels of employee self efficacy have been found to prevent negative consequences of service work such as stress, and has a positive impact on job performance (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996). Self-efficacious employees usually feel more comfortable in their job role, are able to work independently and therefore they experience higher levels of job satisfaction and cope better with job stress (Judge and Bono, 2011). The results suggest that employees with higher self-efficacy do not rely on co-worker or supervisor support to achieve customer orientation, probably because of their ability to work independently. Attributes such as self-efficacy are extremely helpful in an industry, such as real estate, which has a high level of pressure for the employees, and is high involvement and emotionally charged for the customers (Arnold, Palmatier, Grewal, and Sharma, 2009).

Job satisfaction is a psychological state, which has a direct relationship with customer orientation. Job satisfaction moderates the relationship between standards for service delivery and customer orientation, which emphasizes the importance of support and positive culture at an organisational level (Vandenberghe et al., 2007).

The findings indicate that as job satisfaction increases, the relationship between standards for service delivery and customer orientation increases. This suggests that employees who are satisfied with their jobs are more connected to the organisation and more willing to do their best for the customers.

Although many studies show that job satisfaction leads to better performance, as shown in this study, there is evidence that good job performance also leads to job satisfaction and there is a relationship between staff well-being and job satisfaction (Wright and Cropanzano, 2000).

### *9.1 Management Implications and Limitations*

Overall, the findings have important implications at the industry, organisational company strategy and operational level of management culture, work design conditions, customer service values, staff selection and training. The real estate industry is characterised as a high-pressure and challenging service sector. The competitive environment is difficult and organisations operate under a lot of pressure to survive, which has implications for customer oriented attitudes and behaviours.

Customer orientation is affected by individual differences (Kilic and Dursun, 2007) and some employees appear to need stronger support and guidance from the organisational management than others. Also, organisational structure needs to be considered to achieve best results. The findings of this study support the notion that each employee is influenced in a dynamic way by other fellow employees, management strategies, attitudes, values and the job outcomes. Therefore, it is important for managers in highly competitive and challenging service industries such as real estate, to understand the subtleties and moderating effects of the organisational, employee and customer relationships to maximise the opportunity for developing customer orientation in their staff. Managers need to communicate core



organisational values regarding customer service and customer orientation to employees as these are antecedents of customer satisfaction.

Employee self-efficacy is an important personality trait which can be developed through effective training. Self-efficacy is connected to individual (personality) differences (Judge, Jackson, Shaw, Scott and Rich, 2007), and therefore it can be identified and nurtured through careful recruitment and staff development programs. Self-efficacy has intrinsic and extrinsic antecedents and managers need to provide adequate and appropriate training and support for staff in high-pressure service contexts (Lings et al., 2009). Effective organisational policies and cultural values enhance the performance of self-efficacious staff. Careful, strategic staff recruitment can create cooperative and healthily competitive work teams which need to be appropriately motivated, rewarded and managed to achieve the best possible customer orientation attitudes and behaviours which lead to high customer satisfaction and sales.

In addition to careful staff selection, organisations need to provide ongoing professional training during all stages of the employee's career before negative attitudes and behaviours are established (Stock and Hoyer, 2005). Management policies and leadership influence staff attitudes and whether they cooperatively support the organisational effort towards long and short term goals such as customer satisfaction.

This study indicates that as job satisfaction increases, the relationship between standards for service delivery and customer orientation increases. This suggests that employees who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to cooperate with organisational values and management direction with positive outcomes. Managers need to pay attention to the complex and, sometimes, subtle antecedents of job

satisfaction. Although many studies show that job satisfaction leads to better performance, as shown in this study, there is evidence that job performance related customer orientation also leads to job satisfaction and general well-being (Wright and Cropanzano, 2000).

Encouraging an appropriate mix of customer and sales oriented attitudes according to the type of business conditions is an effective way to achieve short and long term organisational goals (Bagozzi et al, 2012). Differentiating between sales and customer oriented staff attitudes (Saxe and Weitz, 1982) is very valuable for real estate managers to enable development of effective teams with complementary diverse skills and attitudes. Customers commonly express a lack of trust in real estate agencies which may have negative consequences for both customers and staff (Aziz, 2005; Roulac, 2006, 1999). Adopting customer oriented management strategies which aim to achieve better outcomes for the customers and the staff should lead to improved customer perceptions, increased customer satisfaction and higher profitability. Indeed, the industry as a whole may benefit from a more positive public image. Taking a proactive positive approach is a winning scenario for staff well-being, customer satisfaction and organisational success. To reap the benefits of long-term market orientation, managers need to foster positive customer oriented behaviours and attitudes through their organisational values which need to be articulated clearly in terms of specific standards of performance.

The limitations of this study are that it is drawn from one service industry only and with a rather small sample. However, given the study was conducted in a highly competitive commercial setting it should be repeated in similar contexts. The antecedents to customer orientation are extensively researched, the most interesting and useful focus is on moderating constructs which help organisations to adjust their

practices to perform better. Replication studies that examine the interrelationships between moderating variables would be very useful in understanding the complex psychological and organisational impacts on customer orientation in high-pressure caring professions such as health, education and other public services.

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## **Appendix 1: Measures**

### **Standards for Service Delivery** (Susskind et al., 2003; 2007)

Q1 The managers believe that well-trained customer service employees are the key to providing excellent customer service.

Q2 In the organization I work for, we set very high standards for customer service.

Q3 The managers believe that if the workers are happy, excellent customer service will result.

### **Co-worker Support** (Susskind et al., 2003; 2007)

Q1 I find my co-workers very helpful in performing my customer service duties.

Q2 When performing my service duties, I rely on my co-workers.

Q3 My co-workers provide me with important work-related information and advice that make performing my job easier.

### **Supervisor Support** (Susskind et al., 2003; 2007)

Q1 I find my supervisor very helpful in performing my customer service duties.

Q2 When performing my service duties, I rely heavily on my supervisor.

Q3 My supervisor provides me with important work-related information and advice that make performing my job easier.

Q4 I can count on my supervisor to do the “right thing” when serving customers.

### **Customer Orientation** (Susskind et al., 2003)

Q1 When performing my job, the customer is most important to me.

Q2 It is best to ensure that our customers receive the best possible service available.

Q3 If possible, I meet all requests made by my customers.

Q4 As an employee responsible for providing service, customers are very important to me.

Q5 I believe that providing timely, efficient service to customers is a major function of my job.

### **Employee Self-Efficacy** (Jones, 1986).

Q1 My job is well within the scope of my abilities.

Q2 I did not experience any problems in adjusting to work at this organization.

Q3 I feel that I am over qualified for the job I am doing.

Q4 I have all the technical knowledge I need to deal with my job.

Q5 I feel confident that my skills and abilities equal or exceed those of my colleagues.

Q6 My past experience and accomplishments increase my confidence that I can perform successfully in this organization.

Q7 I could handle a more challenging job than the one I'm doing.

**Job Satisfaction** (Brown and Peterson, 1993)

Q1 I am satisfied with my co-workers.

Q2 I am happy with my supervisor(s).

Q3 I am happy with the organization's policies.

Q4 I am satisfied with the support provided in my job.

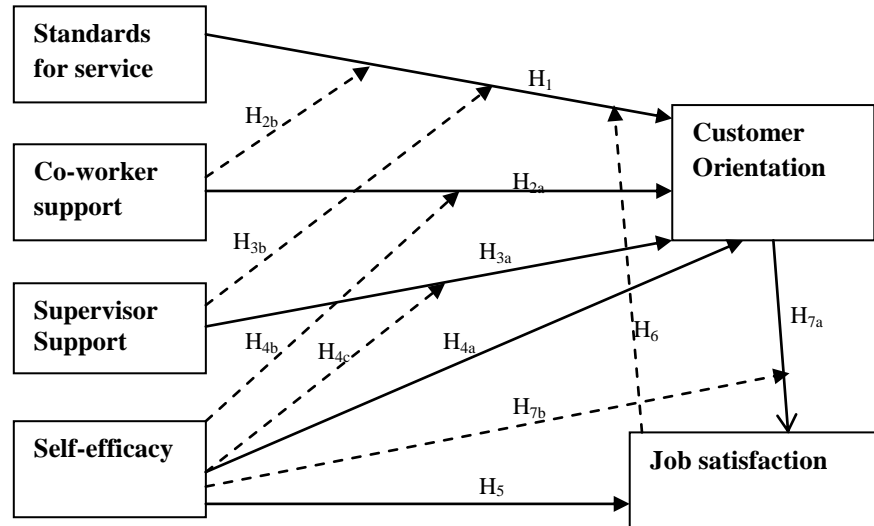
Q5 I am happy with my salary.

Q6 There are good opportunities for advancement in this organization.

Q7 I am happy with this organization's clients.

Q8 Overall, I am satisfied with this job.

**Figure 1: The Conceptual Model**



**Table 1: Means, Correlations, AVE and Cronbach alphas**

Variables	M	SD	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Employee self-efficacy	5.27	0.92	.68	<b>.646</b>					
2. Job satisfaction	5.23	1.18	.81	.334**	<b>.685</b>				
3. Customer orientation	6.30	0.90	.90	.498**	.324**	<b>.769</b>			
4. Co-worker support	4.67	1.38	.75	.182	.612**	.362**	<b>.709</b>		
5. Supervisor support	4.39	1.41	.76	.288**	.605**	.382**	.657**	<b>.667</b>	
6. Standards for service delivery	5.50	1.08	.60	.563**	.547**	.514**	.469**	.504**	<b>.664</b>

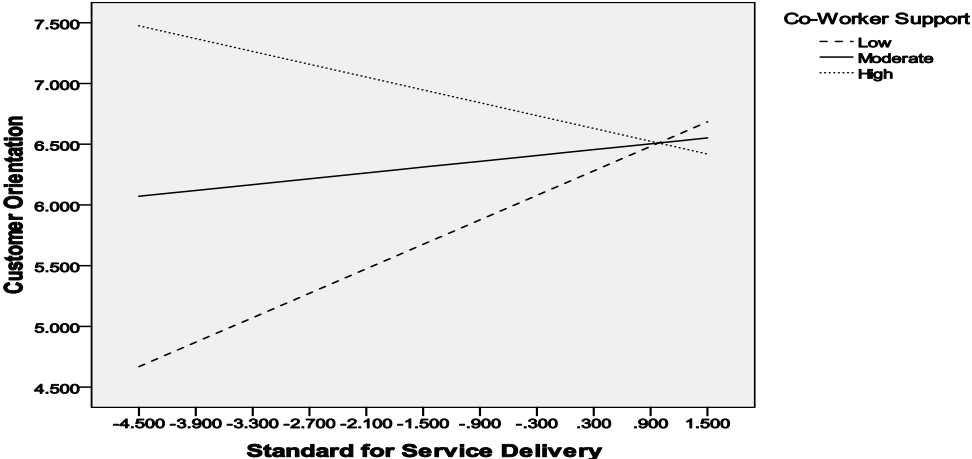
\*\* Sig. at .01 \* Sig. at .05 (Average Variance Extracted shown in bold in the diagonal)

**Table 2: Moderating effect of Co-worker and Supervisor Support in the relationship between Standards for Service Delivery and Customer Orientation**

Dependent variable:		$\beta$	SE	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
Customer orientation					
Model 1	Standards of service delivery (SSD)	.370**	.079		
	Co-worker support (CWS)	.101	.061	.269	
Model 2	SSD x CWS	-.153**	.047	.331	.062
Dependent variable:					
Customer Orientation					
Model 3	Standards of service delivery (SSD)	.361**	.080		
	Supervisor support (SS)	.106	.061	.271	
Model 4	SSD x SS	-.037	.040	.270	.001

\* p< .05, \*\* p<.01

**Figure 2: The Moderating Effect of Co-Worker Support on the relationship between Standards for Service Delivery and Customer Orientation**



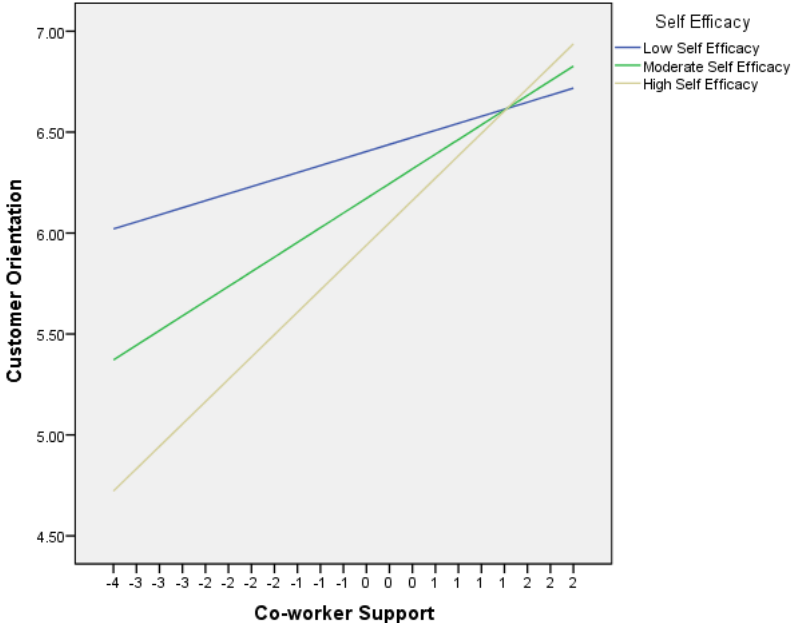


**Table 3: Moderating Effect of Self-Efficacy on the relationship between Co-worker Support and Customer Orientation**

Dependent variable:		$\beta$	SE	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Customer orientation					
Model 5	Co-worker support	.183	.053		
	Self-efficacy	.486**	.089	.324	
Model 6	CWS x ESE	-.236**	.047	.456	.132
Dependent variable:					
Customer Orientation					
Model 7	Supervisor support	.167	.054		
	Self-efficacy	.460**	.092	.297	
Model 8	SS x SE	-.123	.046	.336	.039

\* p<.05, \*\* p<.01

Figure 3: The Moderating effect of Self-efficacy in the Relationship between Customer Orientation and Co-worker Support



**Table 4: The Moderating Effect of Job Satisfaction on the relationship between Standards for Service Delivery and Customer Orientation**

Dependent variable:		$\beta$	SE	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
Customer orientation					
Model 9	Standards of service delivery (SSD)	.403*	.084		
	Job satisfaction (JOBSAT)	.051	.083	.253	
Model 10	SSD x JOBSAT	.100*	.042	.284	.031

\* p<.05, \*\* p<.01

**Figure 4: The Moderating Effect of Job Satisfaction on the relationship between Standards for Service Delivery and Customer Orientation**

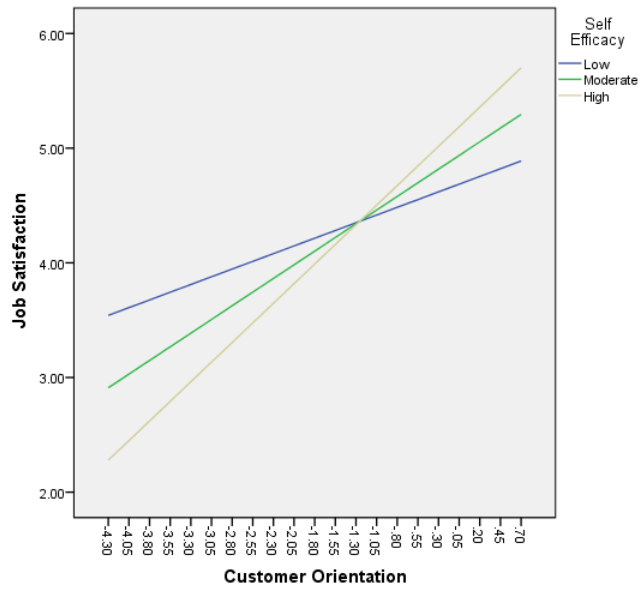


**Table 5: The Moderating Effect of Self-Efficacy on the relationship between Customer Orientation and Job satisfaction**

Dependent variable:		$\beta$	SE	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Job Satisfaction					
Model 10	Customer Orientation (CO)	.477***	.143		
	Employee Self-Efficacy (ESE)	.315*	.132	.145	
Model 11	CO x ESE	.250**	.086	.210	.075**

\* p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

**Figure 5: The Moderating Effect of Self-Efficacy on the relationship between Customer Orientation and Job satisfaction**



**Table 6: Summary of the Hypotheses and Findings**

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Supported</b>
H <sub>1</sub> Standards for Service Delivery (organisational culture) positively influence customer orientation.	Yes
H <sub>2a</sub> : Co-worker support positively influences customer orientation.	No
H <sub>2b</sub> : The higher the co-worker support, the stronger the relationship between standards for service delivery and customer orientation.	Yes
H <sub>3a</sub> : Supervisor support positively influences customer orientation.	No
H <sub>3b</sub> : The higher the supervisor support, the stronger the relationship between standards for service delivery and customer orientation.	No
H <sub>4a</sub> : Self-efficacy positively influences customer orientation.	Yes
H <sub>4b</sub> : The higher the employee's self-efficacy, the weaker the relationship between co-worker support and customer orientation.	Yes
H <sub>4c</sub> : The higher the employee's self-efficacy, the weaker the relationship between supervisor support and customer orientation.	No
H <sub>5</sub> : Self-efficacy positively influences job satisfaction.	Yes
H <sub>6</sub> : The higher the employee's job satisfaction, the stronger the relationship between standards for service delivery and customer orientation.	Yes
H <sub>7a</sub> : Customer orientation positively influences job satisfaction.	Yes
H <sub>7b</sub> : The higher the self- efficacy the stronger the relationship between customer orientation and job satisfaction	Yes